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MEMBER OF THE BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION.

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## PREFACE.

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ONE of the great advantages arising from a study of Natural History is that it is practically inexhaustible. Fresh facts are being brought to light every day, and the more we study them the more we find there is to learn. The truth of this is forcibly impressed upon us as we reflect that the present number of 'The Zoologist' brings to a close the forty-fourth annual volume of this journal. In point of interest and originality it is perhaps not inferior to any of its predecessors, as a glance at the contents will show.

The establishment of a Marine Biological Laboratory at Plymouth (p. 24) marks a new era in the history of biological science in this country, and gives a fresh impulse to scientific research.

The labours of the Committee appointed by the British Association to collect information relating to the Migration of Birds have resulted in the publication, during the past year, of a Seventh Annual Report (p. 460), embodying statistics of much interest and value. It is to be hoped that this Committee will receive a sufficient measure of support to encourage a continuance of their work until such time as the materials amassed by them will enable a practical solution of the many interesting problems attending the subject of their enquiry.

Of the great utility of 'The Zoological Record' we have frequently had occasion to speak. For workers in every branch of Zoology no more useful annual has ever been designed, and we are surprised to learn that it is not universally supported by local Natural History Societies throughout the country. We would strongly urge the secretaries of such societies to recommend this annual volume for purchase, not only on account of the benefit which the members would derive from consulting it, but because the expense incurred in its production is so great that, without wider support than is at present accorded, it can scarcely be maintained.

It is satisfactory to note throughout the pages of the present volume the scattered contributions towards a better knowledge of the fauna of Ireland, a subject which has been somewhat neglected. Professor Haddon's review of recent contributions to the Marine Invertebrates (pp. 1-8) it is to be hoped will stimulate further research in this direction; while the communications of Messrs. Ussher on the Birds of the Saltees and Kerraghs (pp. 88-98), and the breeding of the Fork-tailed Petrel on the Blasquets (p. 367), Warren on the summer birds visiting Mayo (pp. 296, 297), Cockerell on the Mollusca of the Skelligs (pp. 418-420), and Ellison on some of the rarer species in Wicklow (pp. 489, 490, form additions to the Zoology of Ireland which should not be overlooked. Nor should Dr. Benson's recently published

book on Irish Song Birds (p. 384) be left unmentioned, seeing the good example which it sets to other resident naturalists in Ireland.

Of the longer and more important articles which have appeared in these pages during the past year a few may be specially noticed as of more than ordinary interest. Amongst these are Mr. Seeböhm's critical reviews of the genera *Hæmatopus* (pp. 41-49) and *Numenius* (pp. 137-148), and the same writer's interesting remarks (p. 225) on the Pheasant of St. Helena, *Phasianus torquatus*, which, although imported thither more than 300 years ago, and subjected to a different climate and new conditions of life, has in all that time altered so little as to be practically indistinguishable at the present day from examples of the parent stock from China.

There is still so much to be learnt respecting the Cetacea, that Mr. Southwell's account of the voyage of 'The Eclipse' (pp. 50-54) and Mr. Heneage Cocks' Report on the Finwhale Fishery on the North European Coast (pp. 121-136) are useful contributions towards the life-history of these marine monsters.

An article on "Beavers and their ways" (pp. 265-286) embodies the chief facts of interest concerning the structure, habits, systematic position, and present geographical distribution of these curious animals in Europe and America, with remarks on the former existence of Beavers in Great Britain.

From an archæological point of view the facts stated in an article "On the former Nesting of the Spoonbill in Middlesex" (pp. 81-88), illustrated by Charles Whymper, are of special interest to ornithologists, since they relate to a hitherto unsuspected breeding-haunt of a very singular bird, whose nesting in England has not been recorded oftener than on two previous occasions.

The advent to this country of birds, which are either visitors for the first time or of very rare occurrence here, is always a matter of interest. During the past year the following species have been reported to have been met with, namely:—The Continental Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (p. 73), the Nutcracker (p. 182), Tengmalm's Owl (p. 214), Blue Throat (p. 249), Icterine Warbler (pp. 333, 334), Yellow-browed Warbler (p. 487), Tawny Pipit and Citril Finch (p. 490), King Duck and Hooded Merganser (p. 335).

The variety of these communications (with others which we have not space to notice) betokens a degree of activity amongst the contributors to this journal which is very satisfactory. The editor would fain hope that in the new year which is about to commence he may continue to receive no less convincing proofs of the interest which they take in this publication, and the cause which it is intended to serve.

It should be borne in mind by the readers of 'The Zoologist' that the contributors really make it what it is, and that if any improvement be still needed it rests with them to effect it.

It seems not too much to expect that a journal like 'The Zoologist,' which has been in progress for more than forty years, should continue to receive that genuine support from naturalists which its proprietor, Mr. Newman, has so long, with public spirit, endeavoured to deserve.

J. E. H.



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